

A  
**SERMON**

DELIVERED AT CAMBRIDGE,

DECEMBER 25, 1817:

AT THE

OPENING OF A NEW MEETING HOUSE,

AND

CONSTITUTION OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH

IN THAT PLACE.

==  
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# SERMON.

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I COR. iii. 9.

YE ARE GOD'S BUILDING.

AMONG the various figures which the Holy Ghost has seen fit to employ in representing the church of Christ, that of a spacious lofty temple presents her in the most sublime and exalted attitude. Indeed, a regularly organized church founded on evangelical principles, and walking in love, is one of the most interesting associations on earth. This we infer not only from the excellency of character which it embraces, but from the consideration, that it will survive all others, and ultimately make a part of the general assembly, and church of the First-born who are written in heaven.

The author of this epistle had successfully planted the standard of the CROSS on the ramparts of pagan superstition; and had been happily instrumental in gathering a christian church among the licentious Corinthians. Apollos had very probably heard of this good work, and had come to his assistance. He laboured to water the seed which had been sown by Paul.

Although these holy men acted in perfect agreement, both endeavouring to promote the same cause, yet as their gifts were different, the Corinthians soon discovered a partiality, each for his favourite teacher. This partiality occasioned "envying and strife and divisions" among them, one declaring himself for Paul, another giving his suffrage for Apollos.

From this unhappy state of things the Apostle took occasion to ask, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." As if he had said, You must perceive, brethren, that there is no disagreement between us; for "he that planteth, and he that watereth are one, and every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God:" or perhaps it might be better rendered, We are joint labourers of God.

"Ye are God's husbandry," or *field*, which we are sent to cultivate. The term husbandry, used by the translators, does not appear to be the most happily chosen: for it seems rather to have been the Apostle's object to point out the place or scene of their labours, than to show the state of cultivation produced. This idea was very natural after the preceding reasoning. He had just been using the figurative language of *planting* and *watering*; he now tells them, that they are God's field, where the seed of the word had thus been sown and watered. Changing the figure, the Apostle adds, *Ye are God's building*. This implies either that they were built by God as the efficient agent, or that they were exclusively his property. The original word (*oikodomen*) perhaps most generally signifies the builder, but in some instances it means the building itself.\*

The true church is as really built by God as the temple at Jerusalem was by Solomon. He directs and superintends the whole process. It is equally true, that the building belongs to him. He justly claims the church as his own: as a people whom he hath redeemed to himself, out of every kindred, tongue and tribe. On this ground the Apostle urged upon the Corinthians the duty of obedience. "Ye are not your own, (saith he,) for ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's." Hence every christian church, if deserving the name, is to be considered as a church of the living God. Destined to survive the dissolu-

\* Vid. Mc. Knight in loc.

tion of the world, it will continue to grow to an holy temple in the Lord. Its completion will be in heaven, where the Head stone will be brought forth with shouting, grace! grace! unto it.

If the church is built by God, we may rest assured that there will be a perfect congruity in all the parts. As the superstructure is to be immense and glorious, the foundation will be as firm as the rock of ages, so that the gates of hell shall never be able to prevail against it. The materials, all chosen by infinite Wisdom, will be so prepared, that the noise of neither axe nor hammer will be heard while the building is going up. The grand design of this building, which will be brought to view as we proceed, will appear every way worthy of its divine Author.

But before we proceed, it may be proper to state, for the information of this audience, that we are not only assembled to open this new house with appropriate services, but to give fellowship to a body of baptized believers, who have covenanted to walk together in the faith and order of the gospel, as a regular, visible church of Christ. I trust I may, without being charged with impropriety, address to them the words of the text,

*Ye are God's building.*

The occasion on which we are assembled will naturally lead us briefly to consider the *Foundation*, the *Materials*, and the *End*, for which this building is erected.

True believers in every age, and under every dispensation, have rested their hopes upon the same foundation. Hence with a view to comfort his ancient, believing people, the Lord was pleased to say by the prophet Isaiah, "Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." It is hardly possible to mistake the meaning of this interesting passage of scripture, as it is so particularly applied by an inspired apostle to Christ.\*

That Christ is not only *a tried stone, a sure foundation*, but that he is the only foundation, is also asserted in our context. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is

\* 1 Peter, ii. 6, 7.

laid, which is Jesus Christ." It is not meant to deny that men would attempt to lay other foundations, but that no other rightful one could be laid, which would prove safe.

It will be undoubtedly recollected, that on a particular occasion Christ asked his disciples, what opinions the world entertained respecting his character. Peter answered, "some say thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; others Jeremias, or one of the prophets. But whom say ye that I am? Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Christ informed Peter that he had not obtained this knowledge by any strength of human intellect, but by a revelation from his Father in heaven; and adds, "I say unto thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church."\* But is it hence certain that Christ meant to say, that he would build his church on Peter? We are unwilling to believe it without the most positive and decisive proof. What christian would dare build his hopes for eternity on such a fallible creature as Peter? Had the Christian church rested on Peter as its foundation, when he denied his Lord, when he denied him with oaths and cursing, must it not in that event have trembled to its centre? But if we place the two positions together, the difficulty will probably be removed. Thou art *the Christ*, said Peter: On *this rock*, said Jesus, I will build my church.

What Paul said to the believing Ephesians, may further assist us in understanding this passage. "Now therefore, said he, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone," or bottom foundation, as some render the passage, and therefore the real foundation.

Apostles and prophets are mentioned in this connection, because they were the first ministers who were sent to propagate this new doctrine, and who by their preaching constantly exhibited Christ as the foundation of his

\* Matt. xvi. 13—18.

church. Did the Apostles ever preach otherwise? Did they ever invite sinners to trust in them? Did they ever preach themselves as the foundation? Did not St. Paul expressly declare, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake?"\* As a wise master-builder, saith he in our context, I have laid the foundation—the only one which can be laid, which is Jesus Christ. This assertion cannot be supported if Peter is to be considered as the *rock* on which the church is built.

But as apostles and prophets are connected in the above passage, some have supposed the Jewish prophets were intended, and that it was the design of the apostle thereby to identify the Jewish and Christian churches as one and the same. But this conclusion does not appear to be correct. If this had been his meaning, it is reasonable to suppose that prophets would have been first mentioned, as they were first in order of time. But if we suppose, what is more probably the truth, that *christian prophets* were intended, then all will appear plain and easy. The same order is here observed, as in mentioning the gifts bestowed on the church at the ascension of our Saviour. "And he gave some *Apostles*, and some *Prophets*, and some *Evangelists*, &c." We hence conclude, the apostle referred not to Jewish, but to New-Testament prophets: and to these only as employed for a season by the great Redeemer, in laying the foundation of the christian church under the new dispensation, by their doctrine and practice.

In common language, when speaking of a sect, we say such a man was the founder of that sect. It is not, however meant, that the sect is founded upon the personal merits of the man, but upon the doctrines he propagated. But in considering Christ as the foundation of his church, we do not simply allude to his doctrine, but to his personal merits, his holy unblemished life, his perfect obedience to the divine law, and especially his sacrifice upon the tree of the cross by which he made an atonement for sin.—In

\* 2 Cor. iv. 5.

this way he has laid a firm foundation for the hopes of all his believing people.

Let the deluded devotees of papal infallibility boast of St. Peter as the founder of their church, and as their *tutelar saint* ; we desire to build our hopes alone, on the BLOOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SON OF GOD. He is almighty to save. He alone is able to keep what we commit to him, against that day.

As if designed to guard us in a point of such infinite moment, it is solemnly declared, "That there is salvation in no other." That there is no other name given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved. Christ has trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people, (either apostles or prophets) there was none with him.

This glorious foundation stone, though anciently set at nought by the Jewish builders, and still despised by thousands of others, is become the head of the corner. This is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes. Christ, though indeed a living stone, is disallowed of men, but chosen of God, and precious. Yes ! to you that believe, he is precious ! Let this foundation be destroyed, and where would you rest your hopes ? To whom could you go ? He has the words of eternal life.

Having made these remarks on the foundation, we are now prepared to examine the superstructure, and to show what the materials are, of which it is composed.

Shall we look to the Jewish church for our model ? Or shall we take it from the New-Testament alone ? If we are under the gospel dispensation, I should certainly suppose from the latter. From a mistaken idea of copying after the Jewish church, have arisen national churches, religious establishments, acts of conformity, inquisitions, persecutions, and martyrdoms. But is this glorious building to be composed of such a heterogeneous mass, as the nations of the earth exhibit ? Nay, verily.

In order to show the disparity between the two dispensations and churches, a few things may be briefly noticed.

When the descendants of Abraham assumed their rank among the nations of the earth, the great Jehovah, the God of their fathers, condescended to be their king. "It ap-

appears, at first view, (says an excellent German writer) beneath the dignity of the Creator and supreme Lord of heaven and earth, to be *elected* the king over a particular people : As such, to be present by an external *indication* : To condescend by the external cymbals of his presence to dwell first in a tabernacle, then in a splendid palace : There to have his table, his altar, and his ministers : There to be honoured with external splendor and pomp : To direct their armies in time of war ; to legislate in their civil affairs ; and in many instances to exercise the executive powers of chief magistrate.

“ In the most ancient times the same were kings and high priests. The genius of a Theocracy required that as the same was God and king, so that the civil and ecclesiastical magistracy should be united in the same man, who should represent, at once, the king and God. The high priest under this form of government was *prime minister* of state. He was considered as a prince, and received *royal* honours.”

Hence it has been supposed, that the nearer we approximate to this form of government, the nearer we are to perfection ; forgetting that we are under a dispensation every way different. This improper imitation has produced in the christian church, Popes and Cardinals, Princes and Lordbishops ! with all the other appendages of the Jewish hierarchy.

“ After the Jews returned from the Babylonish captivity, (continues the above writer,) for several hundred years the high-priest appears to have exercised the functions of chief magistrate. According to Josephus, Joshua or Jesus, the son of Josedech, one of those who returned, received the pontificate ; and he and his posterity, fifteen in all, ruled the state for 412 years, till the reign of Antiochus Eupater. In the time of Artaxerxes, Ezra the chief-priest presided over the church and state. When Alexander the Great proceeded in a hostile manner against Jerusalem, *Juddua* possessed the pontifical dignity and authority. Some time after, while Ptolemy Euergetes reigned over Egypt, Onias the son of Simon the just, appears to have obtained by his

great deeds, the chief priesthood among the Jews. According to Josephus, all the Pontiffs were princes of their nation, until the Maccabees assumed the royal diadem.

“The genius of the kingdom of Christ is far otherwise, being internal, spiritual, and heavenly; a kingdom of truth and peace: supported by no external force, attended by no worldly pomp, propagated only by the conviction which it carries of its truth to the understanding and conscience; and whose citizens are all equals and brethren.”

There is a passage in the 2nd of Acts, which in this connection deserves a moment's consideration. Here it is said, “And the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved.” The important question is, what church was here intended? Could it be the old Jewish church, with Caiaphas the high-priest at its head! who together with the chief priests and elders, but a little time before procured the death of Jesus? It is impossible, we should suppose, to believe that the Lord Jesus, (for he is the person intended in the text,) should add to this church such as were brought to trust in *his* name, whom *they* had treated as an impostor! The (ἐκκλησία) or church, in this place, must therefore mean, the congregation of believers, who had associated together as christians owning Christ for their Lord and King.

A body of believers thus separated from the world, by a personal profession of their faith in Christ, is totally different from the Jewish or any other national church. The Jewish church was composed of believers and unbelievers; of believers' children, servants, and proselytes. Neither repentance nor faith were required as conditions of membership.

In the christian church, no person, however unblamable his life, can be admitted without a personal profession of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for the Saviour, and to make ready a people for him. This he did by preaching that they should repent and believe on him that was to come; and by baptizing such as gave evidence of repentance. Thus John, like Hiram king of Tyre,

was sent to prepare materials for this glorious gospel temple ; but like him, he was not permitted to assist in laying them in the building ; or even to see the building erected. Hence our blessed Lord, whose *visible kingdom* at this time probably consisted of none, or few besides his Apostles, in bearing testimony to John, made the following remarks : “ But what went ye out for to see ? a prophet ? Yea, I say unto you *much more than a prophet.*” (That is, much more than any prophet under the former dispensation.) “ This is he of whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee : For I say unto you, that among all those that are born of woman, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist : But he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” The least of the Apostles had seen the kingdom of God, for the Gospel church commenced. This spiritual temple was now rising in all its beauty and glory.

John, though sent to prepare materials for this spiritual building by making ready a people for Christ, did not know in what manner they were to be disposed of. Yet in his testimony concerning Jesus, he said, “ He that cometh after me is mightier than I—whose *fan* is in his hand, and he shall thoroughly purge his floor.” The work had now commenced. Christ was going forth with his *fan* in his hand separating the precious *wheat* from the vile worthless *chaff*.

These things were seen and understood by the immediate disciples of Christ, which led the Saviour to say unto them, “ Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear : For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them.” John was probably one of them.

If it would not be thought irrelevant to the subject, I would beg your indulgence to one other remark upon the Jewish church. The author of the epistle to the Galatians has represented the Jewish and Christian churches by an allegory. In this he makes *Hagar*, Abraham's *bond-woman* and *her son*, to represent the former ; and *Sarah*, Abraham's lawful wife and *her son*, the heir of promise, to represent the latter. In this allegory

ry he tells us, that Jerusalem, i. e. the Jewish church, which now is, is in *bondage* with her children. But Jerusalem, which is from above, i. e. the true Gospel church, whose members are born from above, is *free*; which is, saith he, the mother of us all—of all true believers, whether Jews or Gentiles.

If any thing farther were necessary to show the nature of this building, I would refer you to the words of the apostle Peter, which are expressly to my purpose. “And ye, saith he, as lively, (or living) stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” If the house is to be a spiritual house, then it follows that it must be built of spiritual materials.

Whoever reads the New-Testament with an unprejudiced mind, must be convinced, that it was the great design of Christ in giving himself for us, to purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works—to form a holy society of regenerated men and women, to be embodied together, and placed as a city upon a hill, that they might give light to all around them.

The remarks, that have been thus briefly offered, show, it is thought, with sufficient clearness, that the gospel church, which is *God's building*, can only be built with *lively stones*. That if others were admitted, it would mar the beauty and glory of the building; and it would soon cease to be a spiritual house. Every minister, therefore, who is concerned in building churches, or giving them fellowship, ought to be specially careful not to build with *hay, wood, and stubble*; for as certainly as he does, his work will be burnt up, and he will suffer loss.

It is our duty, my brethren, as ministers of Christ, to use our best endeavours to render the church as pure as possible. Yet after all, we have reason to fear, that the great burning day will detect many who may have passed through life with reputation as eminent christians!

These remarks are not designed to discourage any from receiving such believers as are *weak in the faith*; but to expose the folly and absurdity of attempting to build a spiritual house, with any other than spiritual materials.

In carrying forward this glorious building, God has employed a great variety of labourers, some with more skill and understanding, and some with less. All whom he has employed, though not all in an equal degree, have contributed to the progress of the building. Apostles and Prophets laboured in their day. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers, have laboured and are now labouring. Many have finished their work, and gone home to receive their reward. We have entered into their labours.

Saint Paul, as a wise master builder, has laid the foundation, and left us ample instructions to guide us in our work, in building the church. He has also taught us how to behave in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. Let us then, my brethren, if we have been counted faithful and put into the ministry, study to show ourselves workmen, that need not to be ashamed. And ye, Christians, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Study to provoke one another to love, and to good works. But I hasten,

III—And lastly, to show the great *end* and design of erecting this spiritual building, or in less figurative language, of a visible church in the world.

1. One great object for which a visible church is established in the world, is, the mutual edification of its members. This is one important end for which the Saviour bestowed gifts upon his church. He gave them not only for the work of the ministry generally, and for the perfecting of individual saints, but for *the edifying of the body of Christ*.

The graces of many who are really the children of God, while unconnected with any visible church, remain in a comparatively weak, incipient state. But Christ has given gifts to the church for the purpose of *perfecting* them. Besides, by their mutual intercourse and Christian conversation, they edify each other. In their church relation, they enjoy the pleasures of fellowship and communion, in a much higher degree than they possibly could

without it. How delightful are the seasons thus spent, when brethren meet and dwell together in unity ! when love flows from heart to heart ! when their pleasures and pains are mutually divided and shared ! This is indeed a sweet antepast of heaven.

2. Another important end for which this spiritual house is erected, is, for the purpose of maintaining the public worship and ordinances of God. These cannot be regularly maintained where there is not a visible church. Baptism is not so strictly a church ordinance, as the Lord's supper. Every minister duly qualified to administer ordinances, has an undoubted right to administer baptism independent of the church to which he belongs. This may be inferred from Philip's baptizing the Eunuch. Nevertheless, no prudent man would ever administer the ordinance without the approbation of his brethren, where it could be seasonably had. But the ordinance of the Lord's supper has ever been considered as a church ordinance. Indeed the very nature of the institution enforces this conclusion. It is not merely intended, to represent the death of Christ, but our *communion in his death*, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the *communion* of the blood of Christ ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ ?" \* The ancient fathers distinguished the design of the two ordinances, by calling Baptism the ordinance of *initiation*, and the Lord's supper the ordinance of *nutrition*. The former they considered essential to their entering into church relation ; the latter important to their growth in grace and holiness.

It is rarely known that the public worship of God is regularly maintained, where there is no visible church. That every true believer worships God in a manner more or less private, will be readily admitted. But public worship cannot be scripturally maintained, but by a body of believers united. Ye, said the apostle Peter, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

\* 1 Cor. x. 16.

In solemn public worship, saints not only present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God; which is their reasonable service, but their united prayers and praises, which come up as a memorial before him. The sacrifices with which God is well pleased, are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart.

There are some peculiarly gracious encouragements to social prayer, and to public devotion. "When two or three, said the Saviour, are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." The gracious fulfilment of these promises has been realized by the people of God, times without number.

We have a most animating instance of the immediate efficacy of social prayer, in the case of Peter. Herod, that impious prince, from his hatred to Christ and his cause, set himself to vex the church. He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword, and proceeded to take Peter. And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people, and give him up to the lawless multitude, that they might put him to death. But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And while they were thus unitedly engaged, Behold, the angels of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison. The dungeon in an instant became light as day. The chains and manacles with which this holy man was loaded, fell from him like a *thread of tow when it is touched by the fire!*\* The massy iron doors and gates were by a hand unseen opened before him! Peter was set at liberty, and his life preserved through the efficacy of prayer, thus offered up by the church. What a glorious deliverance! What blessed encouragement for the people of God to pray! To pray as churches united! Ah, my brethren, did they unite more frequently, and pray more fervently, we have reason to believe, that many a prison would be illuminated, and the prisoners' chains would fall off.

\* Judges xvi. 9.

S. Another important *end* for which God builds his spiritual house is, that a standard may be lifted up to which the people may repair in time of danger. From the walls of this sacred temple as from a lofty eminence, the banner of the Cross is displayed. Here the *BRANCH* which sprung from Jesse's root, is lifted up for an *ensign* of the people : to it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, not only in the preaching of the gospel, but in the ordinances of his house.

A christian church united in sentiment and affection, and travelling in gospel order, presents an inviting aspect. Their language to those that are without, seems to be like that of Moses to Hobab ; " We are journeying to the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you ; come thou with us, and we will do thee good ; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." Hither sinners are attracted ; and hither the weary and heavy laden come, that they may find rest ; as soon as their ears are open to hear, they perceive that

" The trumpet of the gospel sounds  
With an inviting voice."

And of the church it shall be said, " this and that man was born in her, and the Highest shall establish her."

We add once more,

4. The principal and most *important end*, for which this spiritual house is erected is, that it might be *a habitation of God through the Spirit*\*—That the Lord God might dwell with men. Are you ready, my brethren, to exclaim with Solomon ; " But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth ? Behold heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee ! how much less, said he, the house which I have built !"

Although God was graciously pleased often to manifest his glory in that house, yet we are solemnly assured, that the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands ; that is, when there are no *living temples* within. Nevertheless, he hath shown us where he will dwell : " Thus

\* Eph. ii. 22.

saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne and the earth my footstool : where is the house that ye build unto me, and where is the place of my rest ? For all these things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord : but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." He will not only behold him with approbation, but the *antithesis* requires us to believe, that he will dwell with this man. The contrite heart is an abode in which God the Spirit delights to dwell.

When Christ was about to withdraw his bodily presence from his disciples, with a view to support their sinking spirits, he gave them this consoling assurance : "If, said he, a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and *we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*" Every renewed and sanctified heart becomes a living temple for the Holy Ghost. Yet we are assured that the Lord loves the *gates of Zion*, more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.

His mercy visits every house,  
That pay their night and morning vows,  
But makes a more delightful stay,  
Where churches meet to praise and pray.

When the holy Psalmist saw in vision the ascension of Christ, he exclaimed, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive ; thou hast received gifts for men ; yea, for the rebellious also, *that the Lord God might dwell among them.*"

How often have christians when met together been constrained to adopt the language of Jacob, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place ! This is none other but the *house* of God, this is the gate of heaven !" There is not a christian but can truly say with David, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thine house, the place where thine honour dwelleth." But God's house, and the assemblies of the saints, would lose much of their interest were there no tokens of the divine presence to

be enjoyed. Have you not often, my brethren, while meditating on the pleasures of public worship, involuntarily exclaimed, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand," spent in worldly amusements: "I had rather be a door keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness," however splendid.

I will only add, that such as God condescends to dwell with on earth, shall dwell forever with him in heaven; where we shall see even as we are seen, and know as we are known. There all with open face behold, as in a glass,\* the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Two or three reflections shall close.

1. The day on which we are assembled, seems to give an additional interest to the occasion. Is this the anniversary of the nativity of Christ? † The birth day of the PRINCE OF PEACE! Was it on the morning of this day, that the Angel said unto the Shepherds, "Fear not: For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord?" The angel gave the shepherds a sign by which to distinguish the infant Redeemer. "Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." Blessed Jesus! Was thy palace a stable! and thy cradle a manger! Amazing condescension! But this joyful occasion was attended with music, such as was never before heard by mortal ears. "And suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, *Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men!*"—

\* Or reflecting as mirrors the glory of Christ. *Macknight.*

† That the Saviour was born on the 25th of December, is doubted by many very pious and learned men. Nor are these remarks intended to express an opinion in favour of that time, but only to notice the joyful occasion.

What joyful tidings ! What music filled the air ! What lofty strains they sung !

If angels sung a Saviour's birth,  
On that auspicious morn ;  
We well may imitate their mirth,  
Since he for us was born.

Let us be glad and rejoice, that " unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government is upon his shoulder. His name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end. His enemies shall be clothed with shame, but upon himself shall the crown flourish. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

2. The joyful occasion of our present meeting, awakens some pleasing reflections.

A handsome, well-finished meeting-house, ever affords pleasure to a pious mind. It is indeed a pleasing sight, and may justly be considered as an ornament to the town or village where it is. But if viewed in its connection with religion, it excites a much livelier joy ; and has much higher claims on the gratitude of the friends of the Redeemer.

When a new house is erected, and to be opened by solemn public worship, it must be considered as an occasion highly interesting and joyful. Every such place may be considered as an additional fortress on the hill of Zion, for the defence of truth : especially if we have reason to expect, that the pure gospel will be preached in it. In this view of the subject, we offer you, my respected friends of this newly formed church and society, our affectionate congratulations. We rejoice to see you so well accommodated with a house so pleasantly situated, constructed with so much judgment and taste, and finished in a style so neat and elegant.

It gives us pleasure to reflect, that this house has been erected entirely by voluntary subscription, as all houses for public worship ever ought to be. No man, because he happened to live within the limits of a particular corporation, has been compelled to pay towards it, contrary to his own

choice. We sincerely hope that the harmony which has hitherto subsisted among the members of this society, may be considered as a happy presage of their future peace and tranquillity. We rejoice that during the progress of the building no fatal accident has occurred, to mar the pleasures of this day.

The establishment of a respectable church, of nearly fifty members in the midst of this Society, on this day, is another highly interesting event; and one which calls for gratitude and praise. There is one circumstance, however, which has considerably lessened the pleasures of the day.

It is with concern that we notice the absence of a dear sister, whose piety and liberality have long been known to many. With much pleasure had she contemplated, what we this day witness. But God in his mysterious providence has laid his holy hand upon her, and brought her low. We rejoice that he has not given her over to death. Prayers are unceasingly offered for the restoration of her health and usefulness. I shall be excused, I persuade myself, for mentioning her in this public manner, when it is known, that she is by far the greatest subscriber to this house.\*

We consider you, my respected friends, as unitedly and mutually pledged, to use your best endeavours for the support of an evangelical ministry in this place. From an intimate acquaintance with many of you, we have the fullest confidence, that you will not suffer these expectations to be disappointed.

Need I admonish you, my brethren, as Joseph did his; "See that you fall not out by the way?" The correct principles, which you have imbibed, and the grace which you have received, we trust have in some good degree subdued your unruly passions to the dominion of reason. If you continue to live in love and peace, the God of love and peace will dwell with you and bless you.

3. Let us for a moment reflect on your future prospects.

The prospect, my brethren, before you is flattering. You have begun well, and thus far you have been prospered. If you continue in well-doing, you may still hope to be

\* Mrs. Boardman's subscription is 1500 dollars.

succeeded and blessed. Your greatest danger now, I apprehend, is, in the choice of a Pastor. Should you be happily agreed in calling and settling one whom God will approve ; one who shall care much for the flock ; and who, with unwearied assiduity, shall break to you the bread of life : A minister who shall be an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, and in purity : then may you hope for the blessing of God upon his labours.

But should you unhappily disagree in the choice of a public gift ; or settle a man deficient in talents and piety, whose labours should not edify the body, it would at once cast a shade upon your brightest prospects ; and instead of realizing those high expectations which you now cherish, you would find uneasiness and perplexity damping the ardor of your zeal, and weakening all your energies. Such a state of things would probably destroy your peace, and greatly retard the growth of your Society. Truth must never be sacrificed to union and peace ; but almost every thing else ought to be.

Never suffer yourselves to be captivated by splendid talents, where you have reason to fear, that the heart is *impure*, or the hands *unclean* ; where there is not sufficient proof of vital godliness. A minister, however amiable and moral his life, if destitute of experimental religion, will not greatly profit his people. There may be less occasion to complain of what he preaches, than of what he does not preach. To the pious experimental believer, there will always be something wanting in such a ministry.

Should you be favoured with a pious, enlightened, affectionate ministry, (and God grant that you may) what blessings may you not anticipate from the faithful administration of the word and ordinances among you ! You may hope to see this infant church increased with men as with a flock ; until this "*little one*" shall become a thousand.— Strangers shall hear of the name of the Lord, and shall submit and join themselves to him in an everlasting covenant. You may also hope for blessings upon your own souls, and upon the souls of your families ; on your children, and on your children's children, to the latest generations.

I forbear offering a particular address to the church now to be recognized, not from want of affection, but because that part of the service has been assigned to my esteemed brother.

I close with a few words to this respectable audience.

*My precious friends,*

The occasion on which we are assembled is highly interesting to all that love the prosperity of Zion, and in some sense to all here present. You have heard very briefly, though imperfectly described, the foundation on which the church of Christ collectively and individually rests. Are you, my hearers, building your hopes on this foundation only? Is Christ precious to you? Can you say with Peter, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee? Rest not I beseech you in the mere form of godliness, without the power. A profession of religion, without the possession, will do you no good. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. You must feel the transforming influences of the Spirit of God, in order to fit you for a place in his church on earth, and especially for a place at his right hand in the heavens.

May you realize that solemn day which is approaching, when we must all stand before the Son of Man. What shame and confusion will cover the unbelieving world, when they shall behold that Saviour whom they so long despised, coming in the clouds of heaven! How will they tremble to hear their final destiny! To be separated for an eternity from a God of love! and to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power! O how insupportable the thought! Trembling sinner! fly to the arms of the Redeemer! He waits that he may be gracious. Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation! God grant that you may know the things that belong to your peace, before they are hidden from your eyes.—Amen.

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THE  
**RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP,**

*By Rev. Joseph Grafton, of Newton.*

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The occasion on which we have assembled, is solemn, important, and pleasing. Solemn, for it has an immediate reference to the honour of God, and the glory of the Redeemer—Important, for the visible kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the salvation of immortal souls, are involved in it—Pleasing, for the service of God is ever delightful, his tabernacles are amiable, his yoke is easy, and his burden light.

It may not be uninteresting, to take a retrospect of the dealings of God with this people, in effecting what we this day witness. Not far from ten years ago, two persons, members of the Baptist Church in Newton, removed into this place. For some length of time, they were alone, as it respected their religious connections and privileges. Others, of the same sentiments, from time to time, were added to them. The speaker, as in duty bound, frequently preached among them, and the assemblies were ever civil and attentive. Nothing, however, very important transpired, until March, 1816; when at a lecture, on a Lord's day evening, at the house of a brother, not far from where this house is erected, the people flocked like clouds and like doves, "and filled the house where we were sitting." From that evening, several have dated their first serious impressions. The few brethren then residing in the vicinity, thought it duty to open a meeting for prayer and conference, and God blessed it for the spiritual good of others. A place was procured, where they met for public worship on the evenings of Lord's-days. A number of the ministering brethren in the vicinity, as well as others, supplied them; and their proximity to the Metropolis, greatly facilitated their object. Several, during

these transactions, were hopefully brought to the knowledge of the truth, and publickly professed the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the little cloud which appeared, produced a gracious, a refreshing shower.

A number of professors, belonging to the second and third Baptist churches in Boston, and to the church in Newton, conceived it would promote the cause of the Redeemer, and contribute to their religious privileges, to unite in erecting a house for the worship of God, and in constituting a church in the *faith* and *order* of the New-Testament. In these their undertakings, God hath remarkably smiled upon them.

This day, my brethren, you may with the greatest propriety exclaim with the ancient prophet—"Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

We congratulate you upon your pleasing circumstances, and future prospects. It gives us much religious pleasure, that you have been enabled to erect this decent, and convenient place for divine worship, and are constituted a Church of Jesus Christ. In order to obtain and enjoy such privileges as these, did our ancestors leave their native country, when oppressed by the *iron hand* of religious tyranny. Here they sought and found an *asylum* for themselves, and for us their children. For the defence and permanent security of our civil and religious rights, did many of our fathers and brethren, in our revolutionary struggle, *fight*, and *bleed*, and *die*. Yea, more—To procure our religious and spiritual blessings, did the Son of God, who was rich, become poor—He died, that we might live; He lives, that we may have eternal life.

It is peculiarly satisfactory to us, that the method of your embodying into a church, was by relating to each other the work of grace upon your souls, and the reason of the hope that is within you, by which you became acquainted with each other's sentiments, and obtained the fellowship of the saints. This resembled the building of the ancient Temple, (which was a figure of a spiritual church of Christ) the materials of which were made ready before they were brought to the place of building: so that there

was neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house, while it was building. And, indeed, this was the practice of the first planters of churches in this State, (then Colony.) Governor Winthrop, in his Journal, relates the following circumstance—A number of ministers met at Dorchester, (not more than six miles from where we are now assembled,) to constitute a church; but not being satisfied with the evidence of a work of grace on some who offered themselves as members, they separated without effecting the object of their meeting. But you, brethren, having first given yourselves to the Lord, and to one another by the will of God, we view and recognise you, as a church, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. And you, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house; an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

As it is customary, on occasions such as this, for some person to be designated to present the Hand of Fellowship, and this part of the service, at your instance, and by the appointment of the council here convened, being assigned to me—In behalf of the churches we represent, I do, with much pleasure, give you, through the medium of this brother, whom you have appointed for the service, this hand—Take it, my brother, and with it goes my heart; yea, and with it go the hearts of all my brethren. Receive it as a token of our union, and as a pledge of our christian affection for you: Hereby recognizing you as a Church of Jesus Christ, engaging to render you all the assistance and advice, which it may be in our power to grant, and, in return, expecting the same from you.

Your erecting this house for the worship of God, and embodying into a church, was not to intrude on others, differing in sentiment from you, or to abridge any of their religious privileges: No; but simply to enjoy your own. Consider, my brethren, with grateful feelings, your obligations to God for his great goodness towards you. You are now as a city set upon a hill—may it never be hid! A candlestick whence light should shine—may it never become extinct!

As a distinct and independent body, you will have *duties, trials, and joys*, peculiar to yourselves. Permit me to exhort you to the exercise of christian *affection, candour, meekness, forbearance, and long-suffering*. Considering one another, provoking (or exciting,) to love, and to good works.

You are this day, my brethren, like a ship, richly laden, commencing her passage with a clear sky and a fair and gentle breeze ; but which, before she makes her port, has to encounter adverse winds, boisterous waves, and repeated storms. You must not expect to be

———“ Carried to the skies,

“ On flowery beds of ease ;

“ While others fought to win the prize,

“ And sail'd through bloody seas.”

Be sober, be vigilant, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Be careful whom you hereafter admit into your fellowship. You will make the evidence of *conversion*, the turning point, upon which you receive every member. Be *attentive*, be *faithful*, be *prudent*, in your discipline.

In your endeavours to obtain a Pastor, be not precipitate. Make it a subject of your united and fervent prayers. Let not brilliancy of talent—let not high literary attainments, out-go the man of God, the humble disciple of the meek and lowly Jesus. If you can find the man in whom *talents, learning and grace* unite, *well*—but, if not, I beseech you, for Christ's sake, to choose the man of grace.

In closing this Address, I beg to be indulged one moment, in expressing my own feelings on the occasion.—Twenty, who have united with this church, were dismissed from that over which I have the honour and pleasure of being the pastor. To part with you, my brothers and sisters, was like parting with our right hands and our right eyes : but these feelings are, in a great degree, counter-balanced, by the consideration that *here*, with more convenience, you can enjoy your religious privileges, and, we hope, be a mean of extending and supporting the visible kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Most of you were young when you joined the church : and one among you, not eleven

years of age. Some have been with us five, seven, ten, fifteen, and others more than twenty years. Much have we enjoyed of the goodness of God; and in many privileges and spiritual blessings, have we participated together. But our obligations and duties, as pastor and people, this day end. But will our christian affection for each other cease? No:—It cannot—It must not. If we forget one another, let our right hand forget its cunning: and if we cease to love, and to pray for each other, let our tongue cleave to the roof of our mouth. Permit me to say to you, as the ancient Patriarch said to Pharaoh's chief butler, after having given him a favourable interpretation of his dream —“ But think on me when it shall be well with thee.” Nor do I indulge any fear that the conduct of that ungrateful cup-bearer, expressed in the following passage, will ever be exhibited by one of you. “ Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.”

And now, brethren, we commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. And let all the people say

AMEN.